

So you want to organise a public event?





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Tables, marches, vigils, pickets, exhibitions...

An effective way to publicise our message and gain media attention is to organise a public event. These can range from marches to the defence ministry, to a gathering outside a landmine producing company headquarters or factory, and from handing out leaflets outside a meeting of government leaders to street theatre. Planning, imagination and hard work are all that are needed!



Keep in mind the following:

- **Think ahead:** arrange for a planning meeting to strategise for the event, make sure there are a small group of people who will be responsible for the event, notify authorities (eg. Traffic police if you are arranging a march) and make sure that you have a group of people there before the event and afterwards to prepare and clean up. A good rule is to plan your event for maximum publicity with a minimum of disruption to the public.
- **Build alliances:** sometimes it is useful to ask prominent individuals or organisations to support the event; they can suggest a speaker, help with the practical arrangements or offer staff to assist. Make sure that they are well briefed on the event, and on the message you are putting across, share information and documents and work together to plan the event.
- **Advertise the event:** you will need to plan an advertising strategy to attract supporters and explain to the community why you are staging the event. This can be done by: distributing leaflets in your community, sticking up posters in public places, placing advertisements in the newspaper, using the free "events/announcements" section on your local radio station, informing your supporters and allies in local organisations, trade unions, campuses and religious centres through letters, emails or faxes. Often the best form of advertising is word-of-mouth - so ask your supporters to phone other members to let them know about the event.

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- **Get your message across:** if you are standing around in front of a public building in order to make a point, it's a lot more effective if bystanders know what point you are trying to get across. Make sure that you have banners containing your message. Giving out leaflets to the public is also a good idea. Also, practise answering frequently asked questions and train new recruits about the basic messages of the ICBL.
- **Plan for media coverage:** if you are aiming to get public attention, make sure that you have chosen a good time for your local TV and press media. Often events planned early in the day (before mid afternoon) make it into the evening news while events which take place later do not. Send out a media release before the event (see the section on writing a news release in the section in this kit titled, "So you want to publicise your campaign") and designate one or two well-informed members to speak to the media. Have extra copies of the media release, and background information, available for media people who turn up at the event. Think of ways of making the event visually attractive to inspire camera operators and photographers! (See the section on conceptualising and organising photo calls and news conferences in the section in this kit called: "So you want to publicise your campaign".)
- **Think about equipment:** make arrangements in advance to borrow or hire the necessary equipment (eg. Banners, loud-hailers, public address systems and chairs).
- **Think about raising funds:** submit fundraising proposals or ask for donations in-kind (refreshments, paint for banners, paper for leaflets, mobile phones for organisers etc). See the section in this kit called: "So you want to hold a landmines conference" and refer to part IV on fundraising.

Setting up tables

Tables are an effective way to get signatures for petitions, publicise our message and fundraise. Some tips on tabling include:

- **Where and when:** choose a busy shopping centre or area (eg. During a fair or exhibition, campus or community event) and a busy time (such as a Saturday morning or a public holiday);
- **Making your point:** make sure that the appearance of the table invites people passing by to stop and ask questions: use posters, banners and other materials to mark the table. Have a banner made with the name of your campaign and a catchy slogan to convey the campaign message. Display information sheets, stickers, postcards and other materials that can be handed out or given away to passersby.

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- **Ask for action:** ask passersby and people who are interested to take some sort of action when they stop at the table. For example they could sign a petition, join a campaign, make a donation or send a letter.

Marches

A march is a good way to involve members and allies, publicise your message and bring pressure to bear on decision-makers. They can also be motivating events to galvanise support

from new recruits and the general public. Some tips on marches include:

- **Where and when:** decide on the route and arrange an assembly place and time;
- **Giving directions:** elect peace keepers or marshals and train them to direct the march. They should wear something that identifies them (such as campaign T-shirts or an arm band);
- **Leaders and banners:** some marches are led by community leaders or the heads of member organisations. Banners and placards, bearing the message of the campaign should be carried by marchers — to spread the message to the general public and the media.
- **The grand finale:** every march should have a formal ending, such as a rally, sit-in, handing over of a petition to official or a speech.

Vigils²

Vigils are usually fairly solemn and silent. They can be a powerful way of conveying the tragedy of the landmine crisis and remembering its victims. Some vigils have a religious element, making these kinds of events an effective way of involving members of the religious community already affiliated to the campaign and those who have not yet joined. Pointers for organising vigils include:

- Establish a pattern for participants - a line or circle — where the vigil can be easily seen by passersby and not disrupted (so be careful not to block pathways or entrances for example).



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- Stand far apart to extend the line as much as possible - increasing the visual impact of the group and lessening the temptation for participants to chat or socialise.
- Try to maintain silence and composure while on vigil.
- Have monitors to check that participants are fine, arrange breaks, and speak to curious onlookers.
- Use visual items like candles or books for participants to carry while on vigil.

Pickets

These are similar to vigils although picketers usually hold signs or placards, pickets are frequently moving and may involve singing or chanting. It is useful to appoint a coordinator to ensure the line does not become messy and to answer questions from the media or onlookers. Choose a prominent public place or road at a busy time of day.

Exhibitions

The ICBL has frequently held exhibitions of photographic or other visual materials (such as paintings, children's drawings and campaign posters). "A picture is worth a thousand words", they say and an exhibition is a powerful way to illustrate our message and tell the stories of people who's lives have been deeply affected by landmines.

Exhibitions are often used at international conferences, or during community meetings. See the section in this kit called: "So you want to hold a landmines conference" and refer to part IV on fundraising.) In addition exhibitions can be mounted as events on their own, with prominent speakers being invited to open the exhibition. Many photographic and other visual resources are kept in the ICBL's resource centre in Oslo (see the information sheet on the resource centre in this pack). The international campaign is also fortunate to have the support of many professional photographers who give their time to the landmine cause, sometimes providing photographs free of charge.





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Some tips

- Choose a public and spacious venue to display the materials, such as a shopping centre, community hall, school or art gallery;
- Try to find a theme for the exhibition - either related to the area, which is illustrated in the pictures (eg. Cambodia or Africa) or the topic (eg. Landmine clearance, rehabilitation, children and landmines);

● Build up relationships with photographers in your country or region and invite them to contribute to a particular exhibition. Sometimes contracts need to be signed with photographers where you agree about how you will use the images. Also make an agreement on payment - which may include paying for re-prints of pictures, or development, user fees and picture editing fees. Other costs will include the transport of the pictures and mounting or framing.

- Think carefully about how the materials will be displayed. Are the photographs mounted or framed? How will they be hung up (hooks, double-sided tape, velcro)? On what surface will the images be displayed (wall, boards covered with materials)? Simple mounting on cardboard is cheap and easy to transport. More expensive glass framing protects the images better, but is difficult to transport as the frames are heavy and breakable. It is important to display the material in a professional and attractive way. Sometimes exhibition companies can be brought in to help hang the exhibition, and sometimes photographers or campaigners will do this.

- Consider using several different mediums - photographs, paintings, video or slides. Remember that you will need to hire or borrow the equipment for the audio-visual displays.
- Pay attention to the text that will accompany the images: are there captions to the pictures explaining a bit about where it was taken, who the subject is etc? Is there information about the photographer or artist? Is there a sheet that acknowledges the sponsors of the exhibition? Don't forget to include some general information on the landmines issue such as facts on mine clearance, information on rehabilitation, details on countries that are mine contaminated and mine producers.

- Think about the timing of the exhibition. Sometimes it is useful to open an exhibition on an important day for the landmine movement, such as on the anniversary of the treaty signing, the day the issue is discussed in parliament or when an international conference on



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landmines is set to begin. Keep the exhibition up for a limited period, of not more than a few months, otherwise it will lose its impact. Think of ways to re-use the exhibition materials afterward by sharing it with another campaign, displaying it in a new venue or adding new materials or use it again at another conference.

- Invite arts editors of your local newspaper, television or radio station to view the exhibition or attend the opening. Sometimes photographs from the exhibition can be used in a photographic feature in the newspaper (remember that you may need additional permission from the photographers for this).

A checklist for events³

Preliminary logistics

- Have you worked out how to coordinate the event? Elected a committee? Given different responsibilities to each person (eg. Programme, logistics, finances, media, advertising, overall coordination)?

- Have you set a date on an appropriate day (eg. Make sure that the event does not clash with other key activities/public holidays)?

- Is the event location accessible for the disabled? Is there enough parking? Is it located near to public transport?

- The site itself - are there any problems with sound? Is it too big/small? What permits are necessary? Are there enough exits and entrances?

- Advertising the event - how will this be done? Who is responsible for doing this? By when?

- Buses - is it necessary to arrange transport of supporters or speakers? Who is responsible for this?

- Endorsements - have you arranged this? Which organisations/people are endorsing the event? Have they agreed to have their names listed on the media release/leaflet/banners? Do they have a role in the event - planning, making arrangements, public addresses?

- Fund raising - have you arranged donations or contributions for the event? Prepare for a post-rally fund appeal.

- Media - initial press release/conference, ongoing work with contacts - interviews, briefings

Site logistics

- locate or build stage
- arrange chairs for speakers and supporters





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- arrange rain or sun protection?
- organise the sound system
- arrange security - limited access to stage
- obtain permits in advance if necessary
- nurse/doctor or first aid equipment
- set up booths for food and drinks
- if the site is not clearly visible - stick up signs
- stage decorations: make banner/s for the stage with slogans and campaign name
- clean up: have rubbish bins available, have a team of people ready to clean up afterwards
- programme: appoint a moderator/chairperson, arrange speakers in advance, determine length of programme and how long each speak, ensure there is a balance of speakers (men/women, local/international, deminers/campaigners/survivors etc), arrange interpretation if necessary
- entertainment: arrange musicians, actors etc well in advance
- if it is a large event: arrange "marshalls" to deal with crowd/provide information
- literature, materials: have tables with T-shirts, leaflets, books, stickers, postcards etc.

Follow up

- clean up site
- thank you letters to speakers, sponsors etc
- hold an evaluation

Footnotes

- ¹ Much of this section has been taken from Do it Justice, A Project of the Social Justice Partnership and Oxfam Canada, S. Gage and S. Ockenden (Victoria: Oxfam Canada, 1996)
- ² War Resisters League: Organizer's Manual, Ed. Ed Hedemann (New York: War Resisters League, 1986), pp 179, 180.
- ³ War Resisters League: Organizer's Manual, Ed. Ed Hedemann (New York: War Resisters League, 1986), pp 158 - 160.

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